

Testimony of Alyssa M. Kabusk
Connecticut School Counselor Association
In regards to

H.B. No. 5037- AN ACT ADJUSTING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2023.

Appropriations Subcommittee on Elementary and Secondary Education
Public Hearing - February 17, 2022

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France and respected members of the Appropriations Committee, my name is Alyssa Kabusk and I am a school counselor at West Side Middle School in Waterbury. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony regarding HB5037- an Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2023. **Specifically, I am here today to testify about the importance of school counselors and the need to fund additional school counselors so that every student has access to a school counselor.**

As the 8th Grade Counselor in a building of over 1000 students, my individual case load is currently over 340 students...and growing daily. There is quite literally a newly transferred student sitting in my office as I write this because I'm not quite sure where the best class to place her is, as they are all currently so full. This challenge has made it virtually impossible for me to support every student. While this ever-increasing number of students is concern enough, COVID-19 has impacted the population further. I have seen a significant increase of anxiety in students over the past two years. I'm not talking about a little nervousness here and there, but crippling anxiety and panic attacks in students that I have never seen in my experience in the field thus far. These emergent situations have to be dealt with immediately, which further lessens access to my office for other students who require support. How do I tell one student that their need simply isn't as important as another student's? How do I ask a student to "be patient" and wait for my assistance while I am needed to support someone else?

School Counselors are known as the "heart of the building". We listen, we guide, we support, we teach, we comfort, we advocate, we collaborate...I could go on and on. The rapport we build with students goes a long way. When I am responsible for 300+ students, I am constantly putting out fires. I don't always have the time to listen, guide, support, teach, comfort, advocate, etc. One planned day in the classroom giving a lesson turns into a disaster when I'm not in my office and there are peer situations that need mediation, a student who needs individual counseling, a student in crisis, or a student who simply needs a minute of support. How can I possibly be available to all of those students AND complete my job duties by providing developmental guidance when it is just me? While there are two other counselors in my building and we do our best to collaborate, they each have their own heavy caseloads and crises to handle. It becomes near impossible to do our job effectively. Often times, the neediest students are the ones that get the most support and sadly, the rest are left to figure things out on their own. Maybe we have time to meet with them once or twice, but they deserve more than we are able to give them when we're one person being pulled in 340 (and growing!) directions.

I would ask that the appropriations committee consider appropriating money specifically for school counseling and the hiring of more school counselors. This is important to those of us in the thick of it who used to find so much joy and passion in the field. This is important to the future of our children in CT. Give us what we need to do our job effectively and to rediscover that joy and passion. Counseling is a helping profession. Help us to continue helping others.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Alyssa M. Kabusk
School Counselor
West Side Middle School
akabusk@waterbury.k12.ct.us
(203) 574-8124

